

17 Hammond Place
Woburn, MA 01801
February 24, 2020

The Honorable Judge Joel H. Slomsky
James A. Byrne US Courthouse
601 Market Street
Philadelphia, PA 19106

Dear Judge Slomsky:

My name is Andrew Puddington, and I'm writing in support of Justin May, my close friend.

I first met Justin almost 2 years ago around the spring of 2018, when I was invited to join a friend's Discord chat group that he had also recently joined. We quickly became friends, later getting the chance to meet up and hang out with our mutual friends in person as well. As we got to know each other better, I found that we also had a lot of personality traits and thought processes in common, and we became quite close as a result. In many ways Justin is a mirror of myself, if circumstances had turned out differently. My own difficulties usually result in my not doing something I *should*, rather than doing something I *shouldn't*, so I haven't gotten myself into the same kind of trouble as Justin has, but I can still empathize and see how he got here. I won't try to describe the clinical details of Justin's condition, leaving that to the professionals, but rather I hope to share some of my personal understanding of his story, from the perspective of someone similar.

While I got along with him well mostly all the time, he was known to have some angry outbursts on occasion at other members of the chat group with individuals that rubbed him the wrong way. When he got worked up, his brain-to-mouth filter stopped working, and he'd say a lot of things he didn't really mean and was deeply regretful of later on after he'd calmed down. I sometimes found myself mediating those disputes, and while his reactions were excessive or seemingly irrational to others, I was able to understand his point of view and help him learn more appropriate social skills. Over the course of a year or so after he'd joined the group, he did get markedly better at self-control and aggressive behavior. Aside from the occasional emotional outburst, he was generally a very kind, funny and generous guy, in particular always eager to help others out in any way he could and share his talents.

While we shared many common interests and talked about a wide range of topics, any time his past or personal life came up, he would change the subject and say he that wanted to keep it private. Eventually it did come out that he'd had some legal troubles in his past, but he never elaborated on any details. Now that the full story has come out, I can see that he was trying to move away from the criminal circles he had been part of, and making an effort to make new, better friends. It was a gradual process of re-learning how to behave responsibly, but he had changed noticeably even in the relatively short time I'd known him.

There were ultimately two factors that combined to lead Justin into the situation he ended up in, in my opinion. One, he's heavily influenced by others around him, especially wanting to please and impress them. Two, he's very reliant on routine, and has a hard time changing patterns of behavior on his own without external forces. Thus, after having been surrounded by bad actors for so long as an informant, when that operation ended and he was left to his own devices it was virtually inevitable that he would keep traveling the same path, not knowing what else to do or how. As he once put it to me after

opening up about what had happened, he “spent so long pretending to be bad that it wasn’t pretending anymore”.

All this is to say that the simple fact he was reaching out to make new friends was a major step of trying to change, as best as he could. He knew his old friends were bad influences, and that he needed positive influences instead. He started out understandably reticent to share anything about his past, but gradually opened up as we both gained mutual trust, and myself and our other friends were able to share support, guidance and encouragement. It wasn’t an instant transformation, but with time he would have kept improving.

Unfortunately, during that period he was still continuing his old schemes, mostly out of sheer momentum, and ended up violating his Pre-Trial Release conditions. For Justin, the way his brain works, when he was first arrested it was like it wasn’t really real. He was back home later the same day, and I think it just never registered deep down that there were real consequences to be faced, and he was able to pretend it never happened to some degree. Even his family didn’t know the full extent of the situation, and the idea of coming out and admitting it to everyone seemed impossible. Quite likely if he had spent even a few days in jail after that initial arrest, the message would have properly sunk in and snapped him out of his rut. As it is, he’s now spent nearly eight months in jail. The lesson has quite thoroughly been learned, and any additional time would serve no further purpose for reform at this point.

Even if on some level he could ignore it, by the point that he knew he was in trouble, he didn’t see any way out. He didn’t even see himself as able to be a good person, or deserving of help. Justin knew he wasn’t being who he wanted to be, but from his perspective it seemed too late to do anything else, so he defaulted to what he knew, because the familiar was comfortable at least. I can’t overstate enough how much direct external influences have an impact on Justin. If any of us had any idea what was really going on, we would have told him to stop. And he would have listened, coming from someone he trusted.

I’ve seen many sides of Justin, both good and bad, who he was and who he wanted to be. What I’ve seen is a loyal, helpful, clever person. While he’s still prone to emotional outbursts and his mouth running away from him saying things he doesn’t really mean, he’s hardly the monster he’s been painted as, and certainly not dangerous to anyone. I miss my friend, and want him back.

Changing habits is hard, but by now he’s been so thoroughly removed from where he started that I firmly believe there is no chance he’ll go back to doing anything even remotely illegal ever again. He never even wanted to in the first place, he was just led gradually down the slippery slope, and then left there on his own. He always wanted to be good; he just needed that external influence on him to help, but didn’t know how to ask for it. Justin now has friends who want to help support him and show him how to do better. Before, we were in the dark about what was really going on, but now that we know everything, we can give the support he needs. Justin now just needs to be given the chance to try again, and I know he’ll take it seriously.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Andrew Puddington". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large, prominent 'A' and 'P'.

Andrew Puddington